



Wednesday, May 21, 1975

THE SCHREIBER TIMES

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# A Wales Chronicle

by Amy Appleby

## Saturday

Oh, it's Saturday, it's Saturday, I didn't sleep a wink last night, and tonight at 8:00 I'm going to Wales with the choir. Oh, it's Saturday, it's Saturday, it's Saturday and I'm not afraid to admit that neither the Toothfairy's triple molar night nor Santa himself ever sent me out of control like this trip.

## Sunday

Um not sure when Sunday began because the Saturday stars disappeared so fast from the window, and the 34,000 feet distance between me and the Atlantic Ocean made my head cloudy. Some were singing softly and most were talking or sleeping in motionless blanketed lumps. I'm glad I woke when I did, for the clouds that we whizzed through were turning from gray to rose, and our plane was flying into Sunday's sunrise. There was no sense in wondering where the lost hours went, for we were soon to be in London. The pain of the landing was more excruciating than that of the take-off. Anticipation rules my mind. There were many others who suffered. We were all abandoned in the back of the plane. Communal misery makes for recovery.

The group looked tired, and excited, and we were met by a

sort of patronizing English cool cat named Howard who clued us in on the pound sterling and the drinking age.

My first surprise was that six or seven miles out of London, there were cattle grazing in rolling fields. I kept wondering whether the polarized windows of our fancy coach were deluding me with a radiant green. They were not. The pastures are indescribable. I must admit that no field in New England can compare with those of the original.

The bus took us west across England, then over the river to Wales. We arrived at the Upper Lewis School for Girls at 3:00 and met lovely Miss Green, the matronly headmistress. We sang before we ate, and were greeted by our hosts soon after. One by one our little group of pilgrims were led off to various Welsh homes all over the valley. My family was there to meet me quite soon, but, being that we had arrived an hour earlier than schedule, some waited apprehensively to be greeted.

I have never seen strangers so anxious to welcome. Pam Schall and I were to stay with the Jones family. Without a hint of ritual they asked us if we were hungry, were we tired, had we traveled well. This was not just the polite, easy-thing-to-say to overseas visitors. These people were

really anxious to know. It was so nice to see that they had been waiting for us to arrive.

After I had heard two sentences of the Welsh lilt, I was entranced. They speak with a running sing-song inflection that makes you want to deny your citizenship. We are the butchers of the English language. The nasal A sound as in can't, and the drawling er sound as in work are non-existent. They say caht and gahden. NOT stuffy British parlor talk, but mountain talk. At the risk of sounding corny, I would say it is a dialect and culture that stirs the poet in a person. We were all taken care of like sons and daughters.

Barbara, Hilary, and Michael took us through the woods to a nearby pasture and Pam and I coaxed a dirty ram. They had told us not to expect to come too near one, and they stood back in surprise while we touched his nose. I sort of felt that we had gained their respect.

At 3:00, we said goodnight to mom and dad, and retired to our bedrooms, which they had vacated for us. There were fresh towels and daffodils on the bureau. I can see already that saying good-bye is going to be misery. I'm surprised that I'm thinking about it so soon.

## Monday

We all put on our best duds

today, and got a coach tour of the Rhymney Valley courtesy of the County Council. As much as I wanted to see the sights, I ended up with my face pressed against the glass, eyes closed. (Quite a sight I assure you, from the outside.)

We were then taken to the council chambers and given a history of the area, and Mr. Stone was presented with an engraved miners lamp. This is traditionally given to retiring council members, much like our gold watch, only more honorary.

The councilor took us to a very high class establishment with a starry lit ceiling, called the Double Diamond. We were welcomed in Welsh, with sporadic English translations. After the meal we sang for them. I'm glad we had a way to say thank you.

## Tuesday

Today we are going to Cardiff, the capitol of Wales, to have a buffet luncheon with W.J. Kedward, County Council Chairman. First we went to Cardiff Castle, an extravaganza of carving, mosaics, high ceilings, 22 carat gold leaf. Outside a parrot gave us an unusual audio-visual show.

Having been previously warned about best behavior, we put on our halos and entered the Cardiff council chambers. The counsellors were in a line at the door to greet us and they seemed very anxious to shake each of our hands and give us a word. Councilor Kedward, who is on call to the Queen and comparable

to Henry Kissinger, was a small, sprightly old fellow.

The photographer asked some choir girls to give him a kiss. Mrs. Kedward then arrived and gave them all a mock slap on the hand saying, "No harems, no harems." (keep in mind that the good councilor is 83 years old).

Afterwards, they welcomed us formally, and we sang for them.

There was a disco planned for us at school tonight, and the dance floor was alive with dancers, which is more than I can say for the boys-on-one-side-girls-on-the-other-side-fiasco-dances that we all have suffered through at one time or another.

I am beginning to feel very ashamed of America.

## Wednesday

Much needed rehearsals this morning, and it's raining, and misting, yet sort of pleasant out. The school provided us with lunch, and we are all going to see the Wye Valley with our hosts by bus. If it were not for them, I think the trip would have been a wasted day. The four boys sitting behind me sang every filthy rugby song in the book, and proved to be excellent entertainment. We thought the Welsh were prim and proper. Not a chance. The bus took us to a little tourist trap with a pink mechanical squirrel that you can ride for five cents. Mr. Stone, Dr. Kusack, and both of the dignified headmasters of the Lewis School were one by one conned into a ride. The scene was in-

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# Welsh Characters

— Impressions by Lillian Schiff

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describable. Come down to Homeroom 2 sometime and I'll show you the photos.

The orchestra concert that evening was O.K.

After the concert, Daddy and Mum drove us to the pub, and Daddy slipped me a pound and with a wink said, "Have a drink for me." That night an anonymous group of us got bashed and sang in the pub till it closed. I met one of the violin soloists named Turnip, and Dad picked up Pam and me at 10:30, when all good pubs close up in Wales. I asked the bartender what people do after that in town, but all I got was winks.

Barbara stayed up and talked with us, and Daddy made a tape of our voices. We'll never be able to get up in the morning.

## Thursday

Rehearsals were not tedious at all this morning because they were the last ones before the concert. At 1:30 the Lewis School joined us to rehearse the combined piece. Afterwards I had my own guided tour of the countryside with a charming Welsh fellow named Turnip. The weather was extraordinary, and I was delighted to find my guide an expert on the flora and fauna of the land.

My God the concert was exhilarating. The place was packed, and people were even sitting outside. We started off a little show, but ooOWEE did we get going. They loved us. We sang in Italian, German, Latin, Hebrew, Spanish, English, and Welsh. We thought our Welsh pronunciation would lay an egg, but one-eighth of a second after the piece ended, they burst into a roar. The Lewis School Choir did 5 religious pieces, in English.

The Lewis Brass Choir performed two pieces, and last but not least, the Schreiber String Orchestra. Throughout the tour, the orchestra had been pushed out of the picture by the choir, but tonight they earned their much-deserved recognition. With Dr. Rusack conducting, I can say more often than not, they played in the realm of the professional.

At the end of the concert - we sang the National Anthem and then the Welsh Choir, and all the audience sang the Welsh Anthem, and every single person sang a piece that went like this:

We keep a welcome in the hillside  
We keep a welcome in the vales  
This land of song will still be singing  
When you come home again to Wales  
This land of song will keep a welcome  
With a love that never fails  
We'll kiss away each hour hiraeth (longing)  
When you come home again to Wales  
We'll kiss away each hour hiraeth  
When you come home again to Wales

I will never forget it.

I slipped out of the sobbing crowd to compose myself in the darkness, but I was accosted by 5 Welshmen who had promised to steal me a Ystrad Mynach roadside sign to take home as a souvenir. So they did, and autographed it into the bargain.

After a farewell party at a local pub, Pam Schall, my roommate and myself went home to a party at my host's house. At 3:00 we had a guided tour of the countryside with two Welsh fellows (with impeccable morals). When we came home we exchanged addresses and promises with our family, and Dad told us that we were always welcome. At 5:00 Pam nodded off, and I watched morning come to Wales.

## Friday

Mom gave Pam and I a beautiful pictorial history of

Britain, and love spoon necklaces. It is an ancient Welsh custom for a boy to carve an intricate spoon out of wood, and present it to his sweetheart. I am told that there is a 20 foot love spoon carved in a tree up on the mountain. I said goodbye to Rich and Turnip, Mom, Dad, Barbara,

vited to a pajama party in room 1106. I went for a while, and got stuck in an elevator with 6 men in tuxedos. I was in my pajamas, I went back to my room and konked out.

## Saturday

I woke at 12:30 to the sound of the telephone. Everyone had left at 9:00 to tour the city. I don't believe it. Turnip's on the phone.

Yeegods, he's down in the lobby. "Well lemme get dressed, and come on up."

He had hitched 169 miles for 10 hours to be with us. "God I never thought I'd see you again," I said, "do you think you'd fit in my suitcase?" Once again I had a guided tour through London with an amiable Welsh fellow whom anyone could learn to love.

A group of us went to dinner, and after numerous unsuccessful attempts at finding a restaurant, we went to the Coffee Shop at the Tower Hotel. We ate like pecaries, and one of the fellows (who shall remain nameless) downed 10 pints of strong beer, and a variety of other drinks and carried on decent conversation.

Turnip told us that it was his second time out to dinner in his life, and we promised to take him to Virgil's, Ember's, Manero's, Louie's and Burger King when he comes to America. We went back to the hotel and found accommodations for our Welsh visitors. Alan Michelak, an American stopped two smashed Americans (who shall remain nameless) from streaking around the hotel at 3:00 in the morning.

1,436,887 things happened today that would be of interest, but I'm afraid I am too tired.

Sunday

We're all going home.

# Welsh Characters

— Impressions by Lillian Schiff —

On April 20, fifty-seven, assorted singers, instrumentalists, and grownups arrived at Britain's Heathrow Airport in 7 hours plus, after traveling for 12½ hours. (Well, if you start from Kennedy at 8:00 p.m. and arrive in London at 8:30 a.m., how do you feel?) Some of the invaders didn't notice jet lag until well after they had wandered about the grounds of Windsor Castle and ridden into Ystrad Mynach to receive a Welsh welcome and a delicious lunch served by TEACHERS ...late Sunday afternoon, in the school cafeteria. One grownup went to sleep at about 6 and surfaced at dawn to begin reception of strong and delightful impressions for 5 joyful days.

## A Former Bengal Lancer

A former Bengal Lancer who had served six years in the Indian Army long, long ago, cheerfully climbed onto a large toy chipmunk in a park, so that some kids from America could get a good picture. When they put a coin into the animal to make it rock, the man continued to smile pleasantly. This was Mr. Reese, scholar and headmaster of Lewis School for boys in Ystrad Mynach, Wales, who, the day before, had welcomed the visitors in Welsh with a simultaneous translation. As we toured the valleys, Mr. Reese casually taught us history in a strong musical voice, pointing to an ancient burial mound called a barrow, then to ridges from the iron age on top of a mountain, and "therre you see the rrred clay soil, so fine for grrrowing food, that prroves we've turned the corner into England now." And much more.

## Melvyn Burtsch

A serious and constant composer who is also a fine pianist came along on a bus trip to a castle in a modern city, Cardiff Castle that could be defended by

one man if need be. Then he led us to luncheon (Were we always eating delicious food like lords and ladies?) at County Hall, given by the Mid Glamorgan County Council whose chairman, splendid in his golden chain of office, told us of Welsh singers who had gone out into the world, and who loved our choir's unaccompanied singing. Our composer guide is Melvyn Burtsch, music teacher at Lewis Girls School, quietly humorous and a demon worker who told a few of us (was he serious?), it has been proved scientifically that the sounds of rock and roll will make its listeners deaf.

## A Great Lady

A great lady told of the letter she received from Mr. Stone, and her reply, "Yes, come and bring your choir and orchestra." She didn't quite know how she was going to manage, but a teacher who became headmistress of an outstanding school at a very young age must have reserves of strength and determination to cope with anything. This lady is Miss Green, Headmistress of the Lewis Girls School in Ystrad Mynach, who "encouraged" her staff, parents, and administrators (Did the night club owner think of treating us all to lunch all by himself?) into housing, feeding, entertaining, honoring, teaching and loving the Schreiber visitors, and who insists that her guests really know

her part of the world before they leave. She succeeds. She never sleeps.

And so on, and wonderful on. To sum it up, if any one typewriter can, one grownup remembers: the Varsity Choir singing in two council chambers, a castle hall, a night club, a school auditorium; our orchestra joining their orchestra with only a bit of rehearsal; the loving and generous hosts of all ages and positions, constant tables of delicious food; the Lewis Schools' singers and musicians; the pubs you can "enter" at age 14; the senior girls' common room with furniture a little better than that for the staff, the good nature of the staff at the foreigners' invasion; the problems and joys of teachers that are the same as ours in varying degrees; the lore of mines and miners; the epidemic of platform shoes for girls; the tired business man whose joy in life is his weekly practice with a 100-member choir.

The purpose of our visit, our leader insisted, was to give a concert. On Thursday, April 24, 1975 the Varsity Choir and Orchestra sang and played to thunderous enthusiasm. After their song in Welsh, cheers resounded through the valleys. The next day in copious tears and endless thank yous, they said goodbye to new friends, and rode off in amazing, unBritish summer weather to conquer Bath and London.

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